



**Emily and Richardson Preyer Buckridge Reserve**

**Local Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes**

**Wednesday, 28 October 2015, 10:30am-12:30pm**

Attendance

<b>LAC Members</b>	<b>Affiliation/Interest</b>	<b>Present</b>
Mr. Mark Cagle	NCWRC – Enforcement	Yes
Mr. David Turner	NCWRC –Biologist	Yes
Mr. William Ridgeway	NCWRC – Game lands	Yes
Mr. Howard Phillips	PLNWR	Yes
Sheriff Darryl Liverman	Tyrrell County Sheriff's Office	No
Mr. Mike Clements	Community Member	Yes
Mr. David Clegg	Tyrrell County Government	Yes
Mr. Andy Hux	NCDFR	No
Mrs. Nina Griswell	Tyrrell County Government	No
<u>Others Present</u>		
Woody Webster	DCM, Buckridge Site Manager	

**Reserve Program Update – Woody Webster**

**Reserve-wide Administrative Update – Fall 2015**

- *Legislative Update*

The Department of Environment and Natural Resources officially became the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) on Sept. 18, 2015 when Governor McCrory signed the 2015 Appropriations Act into law (Session Law 2015-241).

The N.C. Coastal Reserve and National Estuarine Research Reserve is impacted by two additional sections in the Act. One section involves studying the removal of a portion of the New Inlet Dam at the Zeke's Island Reserve and the other will look at moving the Reserve program from DEQ to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources. Details for the aforementioned sections are provided below.

### **Cape Fear Estuarine Resource Restoration**

The Cape Fear Estuarine Resource Restoration section [14.6.(h)] considers the removal of a portion of the New Inlet Dam, or "the rocks," at the Zeke's Island Reserve, which is part of the North Carolina National Estuarine Research Reserve (NCNERR). The General Assembly finds that the dam was constructed by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. It further finds that the southern component of the dam impedes the natural flow of water between the Cape Fear River and Atlantic Ocean and that it is necessary to look at removing this component of the dam in order to reestablish the natural hydrodynamic flow that occurred between the Cape Fear River and the Atlantic Ocean prior to the dam's construction. Based on the findings of the General Assembly, DEQ will take the following steps:

- (1) Notify the USACE of the State's intent to study the removal of the southern component of the dam.
- (2) Issue a Request for Information for a firm capable of conducting an analysis of the costs and benefits of removing the southern component of the dam. The analysis will incorporate all necessary State and federal permits and approvals needed to develop and implement a removal plan.
- (3) Request approval from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to adjust the boundary for the Zeke's Island Reserve. This adjustment involves moving the western boundary of Zeke's Island Reserve 200 feet seaward and removing the area that lies between the current and new boundary from the NCNERR. To compensate for loss of acreage from the boundary adjustment, the State proposes to add equivalent acreage to the northern boundary of Zeke's Island Reserve from adjacent acreage at Fort Fisher State Recreation Area.
- (4) If NOAA approves of the boundary adjustment, the Coastal Resources Commission will amend the Reserve Components Rule (15A NCAC 070 .0105) as further described in the Act.

DEQ will provide a report on its implementation of this section including a copy of the Request for Information and any responses received to the Environmental Review Commission and relevant General Assembly committees no later than April 1, 2016.

DEQ or any state agency cannot proceed with the removal of the dam until the Environmental Review Commission has reviewed the report and a bill providing authorization for the removal becomes law.

### **Study Further Efficiencies in Organization of Department of Natural and Cultural Resources and Department of Environmental Quality**

The 2015 Appropriations Act also transferred many DEQ attractions, including the N.C. Aquariums, State Parks, and Zoo, to the Department of Natural and Cultural Resources (DNCR). The 2015 Appropriations Act calls for a study [14.31.(a-b)] by DNCR in consultation with DEQ and the Wildlife Resources Commission to look at moving additional agencies, divisions, and programs to DNCR for potential efficiency, cost savings, and alignment of core mission and values. These include:

- (1) Albemarle-Pamlico National Estuary Partnership.
- (2) Coastal Reserve Program.
- (3) Office of Land and Water Stewardship.
- (4) All or a portion of the Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs.
- (5) Division of Marine Fisheries.
- (6) Wildlife Resources Commission.

By April 1, 2016, DNCR will report the findings of this study to the Senate Appropriations Committee on Natural and Economic Resources, the chairs of the House Appropriations Committee on Agriculture and Natural and Economic Resources, and the Fiscal Research Division.

- *Budget*
  - The NCNERR received \$594,450 from NOAA for operation of the program during this fiscal year, up \$1,450 from last year.
  - The Division of Coastal Management's state appropriations were reduced by nearly \$100,000 this fiscal year as a result of the recurring 2% management flexibility reduction and its share of the \$1 million reduction for the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality required by the General Assembly in the 2015 Appropriations Act. As a result, the appropriations allocated for the Reserve program were reduced by approximately \$12,672.
- *NCNERR Management Plan Update*

Staff are continuing to write the full draft management plan update for the N.C. National Estuarine Research Reserve. This draft is informed by comments received by the local advisory committees on the strategic plan outline at the Spring committee meetings as well as comments from NOAA. The timeline for the management plan update process has been updated as a result of the writing taking longer than anticipated and receiving additional clarity on the reviews needed. Thus, input will be solicited on the full draft management plan from the LACs this winter. Staff will also be seeking input from the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, N.C. Coastal Resources Commission, and NOAA as part of the process. A 30-day public comment period and three public meetings will be held on the final draft management plan prior to the plan's final publication in 2016, as previously described.

- *LAC Community Member Appointments*

An additional extension request will be submitted to the Secretary of the Department of Environmental Quality to extend terms of Local Advisory Committee members serving in community member seats that expired in December 2014 through December 2016. The request for extension will ensure continuity throughout the NCNERR Management Plan update process. An application and appointment process will be undertaken during the fall of 2016.

## **Site Updates – Woody Webster**

### *Hunting*

Bear harvest increased to 14, from 12 last year. Of those, 9 were male. Size and numbers harvested indicate a continued sustainable harvest. This is likely due to density of the overall population, the high quality of habitat and thousands of acres of nearby bear sanctuaries.

Last year's deer harvest dropped slightly from 30 to 28. Of those harvested, 18 were female, and 3 were button bucks. It was mentioned that the deer harvest numbers are more likely underreported compared with bear numbers.

NCWRC is operating with a full staff, and have done much work toward road reshaping and repair. Flooding during October led to a closure of roads prior to gun season. DCM concurs with NCWRC's opinion on the closure, as Buckridge roads were still saturated well after other areas of the county were dry. No rock was added to the roads since last year because of a delay in the purchasing process.

Dr. Christopher Serenari (of NCWRC) interviewed staff concerning the human dimensions of red wolf and coyote presence in this area. As the first interview in Tyrrell County, staff helped Dr. Serenari locate contact information for other interview subjects.

### *Invasive species*

Contract work with NCDWR for control of alligatorweed was shifted to Gum Neck Landing this year, due to reduced accessibility near the Northwest Fork Bridge. Reserve staff continued treatment of isolated outbreaks at Grapevine Landing and monitoring of previous treatment along its canal.

Staff have received reports of more feral pigs on Buckridge, and even an inquiry about hunting them. Staff plan to deploy trail cameras to determine the extent of the problem and appropriate next steps. Feral pigs are a highly damaging species, and the Reserve program began to trap them at the Currituck Banks component this year. If a significant problem is discovered, staff will likely proceed with trapping efforts locally, but will wait until at least after deer season expires. LAC members questioned the severity of the problem, but after explanation, understood that could only be determined after trail camera deployment, since normal physical signs have been lacking at Buckridge. Previous work with beaver control also showed an atypical level of physical evidence given the large population size.

### *Current Research*

Three research permits were issued in late spring. Jill Arriola, a student at UNC Chapel Hill, is studying wetland accretion rates and sea level rise. She was awarded a fellowship through a partnership of the Reserve program and NC Sea Grant. This marks the first such fellow with research performed at Buckridge. Amanda Faucette is a Conservation Botanist with UNC Chapel Hill and part of the Seeds of Success project. The program collects and analyzes locally adapted seed for propagation and use in restoration projects, such as those following Hurricane Sandy. Chelsea Clifford from Duke University is surveying Coastal Plain ditches for wetland function. Her project surveys ditches across the entire coastal plain. NCWRC staff indicated Ms. Clifford is performing similar research on one of their parcels.

### *Upcoming*

In July, staff participated in an initial meeting with consultants working on a Joint Land Use Plan between Tyrrell County and Seymour Johnson Air Force Base. A series of meetings for the study will occur the second week of November, with staff planning continued participation at the request of county government officials.

The Nature Conservancy and the US Air Force approached the Reserve this year about a potential acquisition of 2,040 acres adjacent to Buckridge, the Woodley tract. The Air Force is interested in securing additional buffer areas near the Dare County Bombing Range, and the Reserve was identified as a potential partner in that effort. The Division has applied for National Coastal Wetlands grant funding toward the purchase, and plans to apply to the Clean Water Management Trust Fund in early 2016. The Nature Conservancy will partner with the Air Force to supply half of the purchase price.

Additional posting of boundary signage in certain locations began at the request of Mr. Schreckengost last year, and continued in February with NCWRC staff. Similar work is expected to continue this winter, after hunting season concludes. Mr. Cagle indicated that the work done to clear up the confusing area of boundary referenced by Mr. Schreckengost seems to have helped.

The Reserve has a mobile home that conveyed with the Buckridge property, but it has fallen into disrepair. Staff worked to clear up title issues this year, and are now poised to make it available for

removal via the state surplus property system. If there is a lack of public interest, staff will move to recycle and dispose of the mobile home. Over the long term, staff is interested in building a field shop in its place, given that infrastructure already exists for power and sewer in that location. Mr. Clements indicated that the septic system on site was installed well, and works far better than one might expect given its location.

USFWS has shown an interest in performing bat surveys at Reserve properties. Their intention is to perform acoustic surveys this winter. The impetus for the surveys is the listing of the Northern long-eared bat and a general lack of knowledge about what bats are on the Reserve. Mr. Turner and Mr. Phillips indicated they will have surveys performed too, but by state and university teams.

Lastly, staff are in the early design phase of a study on Atlantic white cedar regeneration. A previous dendrochronology study indicated regeneration at Buckridge seems to function on a gap phase dynamic, which is unusual for this species. This study's premise is to investigate methods to mimic this dynamic using extant pockets of Atlantic white cedar. Hopefully, the work will be used to expand the community into areas which failed to regenerate previously. Peatland Atlantic white cedar communities are globally rare, and any work to expand its range would be valuable. Also, given the longevity of a forest regeneration study, internal research seems the best route, as most external research operates on a shorter timeframe.

### **Member Roundtable**

Mr. Ridgeway stated that they hope to keep the roads closed for one more week, so that it might be possible to add rock to Eastern Road before bear season. While this is an irregular time for road work, he feels it may be possible to preserve the road condition if rains return. If conditions prevent addition of rock before bear season opens, he hopes to add rock soon after hunting season.

Mr. Ridgeway and Mr. Turner then presented a map of proposed roadwork at Buckridge (shown at end of minutes). Given the road conditions and the expense of maintenance, they outlined priority corridors to focus improvement efforts on, some areas that could be closed to traffic from a cost perspective, and possible new areas that may be opened to traffic over the long-term. LAC members discussed the problems along specific sections of road, and consensus was given that the proposed plan seemed a reasonable course of action. Any roads closed to traffic will continue to be open as foot trails.

Staff indicated replacement of the informal ramp at Grapevine Landing has been requested by members of the public. Approached by Mr. Howard Sawyer, the Reserve agreed to allow a coalition of citizens to remove the logging mat there currently, and replace it at no cost to the state after it was determined that no CAMA permit would be required for the replacement. Mr. Clegg was asked whether inquires by the county for a formal NCWRC boat ramp at Grapevine Landing had progressed any further. He indicated he continues to be in contact with NCWRC staff, but offered no statement that this citizen effort would interfere with that proposal.

Mr. Cagle wished to inform the group of a growing trade in illicit reptile collection locally. He also indicated that Buckridge has been a target for reptile poachers. Prices have gone up online for various reptiles, creating increased poaching. Certain local species range from hundreds to thousands of dollars

on the black market. The group agreed to be aware of any suspicious activity and report it to wildlife enforcement officers. There was a brief discussion of legal turtle collection, and Mr. Cagle indicated that mud, musk, and snapping turtles may be legally collected, and have a bag limit in accordance with state regulations. Only one person was known to locally trap snapping turtles, and he does so with all pertinent permits.

Mr. Phillips and Mr. Turner discussed correlations between big fires and water gauges measurements near the Van Swamp game land. The entire LAC then discussed the recent 3-year wet period, and how it has affected management practices.

Mr. Clegg made a statement indicating his appreciation for the work done by various LAC members, and was thankful for the information shared today. As county manager, he often gets questioned on items members deal with, and was pleased to have additional answers to some of the questions he's been asked. He also indicated he is eager to see a sign for Buckridge on the NC 94 corridor nearby.

### **Public Comments**

No members of the public were present.

### **Review of Action Items**

Action items for next year include the funding search for acquisition of the Woodley Tract and investigating directional signage from main roads to Buckridge. Members chose to maintain an annual meeting frequency, with its scheduling included as an action item for next autumn.

## 2015 Buckridge Needed Road Work

